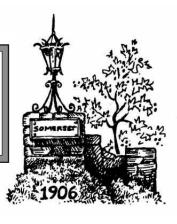


SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL



Volume 56 · No. 7

Date of Publication: January 18, 2010



Moving Ahead on Stormwater Management

By George Wyeth, Co-chair, Somerset Environment Committee

Prominently posted at the Town Hall is a prize winning student essay by **Abigail Muro** of **Dorset Avenue** on what she would do if she were Mayor. As co-chair of the Town's **Environment Committee**,

I was delighted to see that she recommended making residents more aware of the need to control stormwater runoff.

Abigail's recommendation may now be coming to fruition in Somerset. **The Center for Watershed Protection** (CWP) recently recommended a number of possible retrofits—engineering measures such as rain gardens—that Somerset could put in place to control stormwater (see the October Town Journal). Full details on all these proposals can be found on the Town website: **www.Townof somerset.com/environment/Storm Water Report.html**.

The Environment Committee has recommended to the Town Council that two of these be constructed. The first would be a "bioretention area" or rain garden on the undeveloped Town property at the foot of Warwick Place, next to the creek. As recommended by CWP, the rain garden would be roughly 600 square feet. The rain garden would slow the percolation of the water to reduce its impact on the creek, and filter out contaminants.

The second step recommended by the committee is a bioretention area south of the tennis courts, in the vicinity of the Town Hall. Currently, **stormwater drains** through a lined trench into a storm drain. CWP recommends removing the current liner and replacing it with two feet of a soil mixture that will absorb stormwater more readily. The area would be designed so water exceeding the amount that can be absorbed would still empty into the storm drain; there would be no danger of water backing up in heavy rains.



The committee selected these from the list recommended by CWP because they are relatively cost-effective and are all located on Town property. A third option recommended by CWP, along Little Falls Parkway, would control a very large volume of water and is very cost-effective. However, the work would be on County property; we recommend that this be put on the back burner in hopes that the County's priorities may change.

The committee welcomes input from other residents about these proposals. We have already heard of a concern from one resident that rain gardens will breed mosquitoes; according to stormwater management experts, this is not the case because these structures are designed to absorb all water within two days—not enough time for mosquitoes to breed. Any

continued on page 3

Calendar

Monday, February 1
Council Meeting

Monday, February 22 Special Meeting

Monday, February 22 MVA Mobile Office

Don't forget to check the Town website throughout the month for an up-to-date calendar. Go to *www.townofsomerset.com* and click on Town Calendar.



On My Mind

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin

Annual Budget Pre-Season Message

For the past year and a half we have all been closely following the Country's financial downturn with keen interest. At the

same time, we have kept a watchful eye on economic reports from the **State** and **County**, where the situation has been equally bleak. Fortunately, until recently there has not been similar news about the Town's income. But now we have to face a new reality.

As many of you know, Somerset receives a large part of its revenues from a rebate on our **State income tax**. Therefore, the total of what we can spend is highly dependent upon the yearly economic successes of our residents. However, there is a lag between the time the taxes are sent to the State and the time that the Town actually receives these levies. Sadly, we were informed earlier this month by the Comptroller's office, where the taxes are collected, that our income tax revenues are projected to come in **45 percent less** in this fiscal year than in the last fiscal year. This will significantly affect the way that the Town operates. I want to direct everyone's attention to Council Vice-President **Marnie Shaul's** report (elsewhere in this Journal) that elaborates on this.

While this is not good news, I am happy to say that the Council anticipated this possibility last year and passed a fiscally conservative budget. With the appropriate austerity measures between now and end of **FY 10**, I believe we will be able to preserve all our essential services. We will, however, have to take a hard look at some of the "extras" and new initiatives in our operating budget and make cuts where necessary. I am hoping to avoid dipping into our capital projects budget so we can continue to make needed capital investments in Somerset.

We are now approaching work on the FY 11 budget, and the Comptroller couldn't predict with any certainty if there would be any growth in revenues or if it would stay the same. Therefore, we must again improve on our budget process and thoroughly evaluate everything we do and how we do it. We will also have to look at revenue enhancements such as increasing fees to cover the Town's actual costs for services such as building permits, and an increase in the property tax, which has been artificially low for a number of years.

Since I view the whole budget process as the most important function of the Mayor and Town Council, I want to once again urge everyone to follow it closely. We have been riding high for the past five years or so, and I am confident that we can tighten our belts and still continue to have a Town government that helps provide a high quality of life for all residents.

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The **Town Journal** is the official publication of The Town of Somerset, Montgomery County, MD.
Post Office address: 4510 Cumberland Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815 www.townofsomerset.com

Please let us know if you prefer to receive the Journal via email. Please provide your email address to the Editor at *maxinea@comcast.net*.

MAYOR

Jeffrey Z. Slavin, 5706 Warwick Place 301-654-6767 Town Hall Telephone: 301-657-2229 *mayor@townofsomerset.com*

MEMBERS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Marnie Shaul, Council Vice President 5509 Uppingham Street 301-913-5973

mshaul@townofsomerset.com

Bill Farley, 4814 Grantham Avenue 301-961-5987

bfarley@townofsomerset.com

Cathy Pickar, 4915 Dorset Avenue 301-907-4881

cpickar@townofsomerset.com

Alan Proctor, 4900 Cumberland Avenue 301-652-4717

aproctor@townofsomerset.com

Barbara Zeughauser, 5412 Trent Street

301-951-8560

bzeughauser@townofsomerset.com

CLERK-TREASURER

Thomas Carter 301-657-3211

clerk@townofsomerset.com

TOWN ARBORIST

Barb Neal

arborist@townofsomerset.com

TOWN CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

Larry Plummer

larry.plummer@town of some rset.com

TOWN HALL

Open: 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday thru Friday 301-657-3211 Fax: 301-657-2773 TTY users call Maryland Relay

Maxine Finkelstein, Editor Deadline for ads and copy is the 15th of the month at 4:30 p.m.

Somerset Wellness Group

By Diane Horn, Surrey Street

Is one of your New Year's resolutions to lose weight, get healthier, and have more energy? Do your daily habits sabotage your health goals? Then please participate in the Somerset Wellness Group. Our goal is to build community and create conversations about living a healthier life. Why struggle with those resolutions alone? Please contact me (impowercoach@verizon.net) and check the list serve for more information.

Final Action on Pool Management Contract



By Cathy Pickar, Council member

The Council will take a final vote on the pool management

contract with Georgetown Aquatics at the February 1 meeting. The add-on costs to the contract to be discussed and considered are the continuation of Early Bird Swim, the cost of the extended season in the event that the renovation of the pool does not take place (pool management bids were based on a shortened 14-week season due to anticipated bath house renovation), and the additional cost to hire a highly qualified professional pool manager such as the manager we had this past season.

Barbara Condos, the current chair of the Pool Committee, along with Mayor Slavin and Council members Cathy Pickar and Marnie Shaul, met with the owner of Georgetown Aquatics on January 12. The meeting was productive and all present look forward to a successful collaboration for the upcoming pool season.

Stormwater from page 1

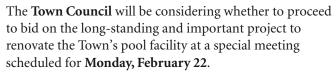
other comments, questions or concerns can be directed to me (*george.wyeth@verizon.net*) or Council members.

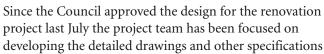
The Town originally budgeted \$50,000 for stormwater management efforts. Mindful of the Town's fiscal circumstances, the committee limited its recommendations so that the total cost is estimated at only \$28,000 (\$12,000 for the site on Warwick Place and \$16,000 for the Town hall site).

While these proposals are being considered, the committee is looking into code changes and other ways of encouraging stormwater control–more to come.

Council to Decide on Proceeding to Bid with Pool Facility Renovation Project

By Alan Proctor, Contract Officer









that are required to obtain government permits and competitive bids that the Town would use to negotiate a contract to do the work. The timing of the meeting is driven by the Council's project plan for the effort and the goal of doing the work without interfering with use of the facility during the regular pool season. This means starting work promptly after **Labor Day** so we can finish in time to open on **Memorial Day**. Working back from a construction schedule that would begin immediately after Labor Day, we need to put the project out to bid around **March 1** in order to assure we will have the contract, permits, financing, and all other details in place to start work in **September**.

The need for this decision comes at an awkward time for the Town, given the twin goals of maintaining momentum with the high priority renovation of one of the Town's key assets, and dealing with the challenges of the current budget environment. Marnie Shaul's article in this month's Journal outlines the challenges of declines that are projected in Town revenues from income tax receipts this year and next and budget and related questions about the future. We also have more than five years of ongoing Town meetings and other work on the project. We have an excellent plan for doing the work, developed by award-winning architect Mark McIntuff and his team, that details the plans for renovating the facility and will assure that the required investment will deliver clear benefits for the pool facility and all who use it, for the environment, and for our entire community. Moreover, the same factors that make the budget challenging also make it very likely that if we do proceed with the project this year, we would be in a strong position to get a highly competitive bid and excellent service. The Council will be reviewing options and making a decision on how and when to proceed at the meeting on February 22.

Visit the special web page set up for this project for more information about the project and additional illustrations of the new facility that is planned. The link is on the Town's web site, at *www.Townofsomerset.com*.

Town Hall Tidbits | By Tom Carter, Clerk-Treasurer



Tax Time Again–Remember: 'TOWN OF SOMERSET'

Somerset's largest source of revenue is a portion of the **State** income tax paid by Town residents. Unfortunately, Somerset will not get its share of income taxes unless its name appears on the Maryland income tax form in the box marked, "**City, Town or Taxing Area.**" A sample of the form appears below.

Please don't forget to complete this section when filing your taxes. It is also important to put your Somerset street address in the top part of the form and not a post office box or "care of."



Found

A woman's watch was found on **Warwick Place** near **Essex Avenue** on **January 5**. Call Town Hall at **301-657-3211** if you think it might belong to you.



2010 Tennis ID Cards

Tennis ID cards for **2010** are available from Tom at the Town Hall office. Fees are still only **\$5 per family** for the annual card. Please make your checks out to **"Town of Somerset."**

Batting Cage Annual Fees

Batting cage users are reminded that their annual fees of \$5 for 2010 are due for continued use of the equipment. Checks should be made out to "Town of Somerset."



MVA Mobile Office

The MVA's mobile office will be in Friendship Heights on Monday, January 25, and Monday, February 22, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Obituary

Dr. Luz Ajero Froehlich, MD



A resident of Somerset for 40 years, passed away on Friday, November 6, 2009 at 81. Luz, her late

husband Walter, and late son David moved to Warwick Place in Somerset in 1967, shortly after her daughter Lisa was born. Both children attended Somerset Elementary School and were regulars at the Somerset Pool each year. Born in Manila, Philippines, Luz received her medical doctorate in 1953 from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. She worked with the National Institutes of Health in Maryland for 23 years retiring in 1993 as Deputy Director, Extramural Activities Program, NIAID. She served as President of the Bicol Association of Metropolitan Washington, D.C. from 1998-1999 and as the Director and Chairman of the medical mission committee to 2006.

Luz moved in July 2008 to Pennsylvania to live with her daughter, son-in-law David, and her two grandchildren, Davison and Kylin.

Permits Granted



The following permit was issued by the Mayor during the past month. (Building permits are approved by the Town Council.)

Tree:

Ellen Globokar and Bob Chlopak, 4919 Dorset Avenue, to remove a dead Japanese maple in their back yard.



Security Report

By Birdie Pieczenik, Security Committee

Status Report: Emergency Alert Survey

Last fall our residents were asked to complete a survey handed to them by **Somerset's Security Committee members** and the **Mayor's volunteers**.

The survey was to form the basis of an emergency alert system for the Town, a way to contact everyone in case of an emergency at 301-657-2229. However, only 60 percent of residents' emergency contact information has been collected to date.

This spring, the Security Committee will attempt to finish the survey. Please contact **Birdie Pieczenik** if you are interested in volunteering. It's an important project for the Town and a good way to meet your neighbors. The committee would also welcome any **high school juniors** or **seniors** who might help the committee with the survey (perhaps for **community service credit**).

Please be advised that until a Town's system is in place, you might want to investigate the Montgomery County Emergency Alert System. It focuses on a wide variety of potential emergencies, from traffic alerts, to weather-related problems, to terrorist hijackings. You can learn more about the free County system by going online and signing up for it at https://alert .montgomerycountymd.gov. You can also sign-up by telephoning the general County number: 240-777-1000.

Also, the Security Committee is looking for a few new members! If you want more information about

the committee, please call the Town office with your contact information.

Crime Stats-January

Somerset—report of a drunken/ disoriented man in the street one early Sunday morning.

Nearby Communities—several car break-ins in **Chevy Chase Village** during one night.

Economic Downturn Affects Somerset's Revenues

By Marnie Shaul, Council Vice-President



Maryland Comptroller's Office

Given the economic turmoil of the past year, the Council asked **Mayor Slavin** to set up a conversation with the **Comptroller's Office** so we could get an accurate assessment of the effect of the economic downturn on Somerset's income tax revenues, our most important revenue source. Earlier this month, the Mayor, several members

of the **Town Council** and the **Town's Audit Committee**, and the **Town clerk-treasurer** met with **George Freyman**, assistant director in **Maryland's Revenue Administration Division**. The data he presented projects that Somerset's income tax revenues will decline by **45 percent** from fiscal year (**FY)2009** to **FY2010**. This decline, though very substantial, will have a less substantial effect on the Town's annual operating budget because the Mayor and Council had anticipated that income tax revenues would decline and set a lower target for these revenues in **FY2010** than had been received in **FY2009**. However, the revenue gap created by the lower income tax revenues is about **\$275,000** (25 percent of Somerset's projected FY2010 revenues).

Somerset's budget has also been affected by the economic downturn through one of the state's actions to deal with its budget shortfall—a 90 percent cut in highway user revenues. This is a reduction in the transfer from the state to municipalities. This cut of about \$44,000 represents another 4 percent cut in Somerset's anticipated revenues.

Although revenue reductions are not welcome, Somerset has some ability to deal with them successfully. First, the shortfall in this year's operating budget is smaller than the revenue reduction because the Town was conservative in developing its FY2010 expenditures; the Council adopted a budget that has expenditures almost \$100,000 lower than revenues. In addition, in the past, Somerset has tended to spend less than budgeted. Finally, with the information the Mayor and Council recently received, operating expenditures for the rest of this fiscal year will be even more carefully scrutinized. The operating budget shortfall will be discussed at the next Town Council meeting.

Somerset has a separate budget for capital expenditures, which is where it finances items such as the recent street paving. Somerset started **FY2010** with about \$2.1 million in its capital projects fund.

Somerset does not yet know what effect the changing housing market will have on future budgets. Residents have recently received their triennial assessment notice for taxable assessments and market values, which will affect tax collections starting **July 1** and therefore plans for the next fiscal year. Based on anecdotal conversations among residents, it appears that although market values have declined, some taxable assessments have gone down and some have gone up. At a recent meeting with a representative of the **Governor**, Somerset asked if it is possible to get data on Somerset's new aggregate taxable assessments and how that compares to earlier years.

One final note: It will soon be time to file your income tax returns for 2009. In order for Somerset to receive its share of your income tax revenues, please be sure to fill in "Town of Somerset" on your Maryland state tax return and use your home address, if possible, when you fill in the top part of the form.



By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin

There has been a lot of buzz recently on the **Somerset listserv** about **traffic calming** and **speed humps**. Many have suggested that we use the **speed cameras** that the **County** and other municipalities have. The **Council** and **I** have done much research on this topic over the years. Speed cameras are prohibitively expensive. The only street where they would be practical and generate any substantial ticket income might be **Dorset**, and I doubt that would be nearly enough

to cover costs. Remember that Chevy Chase Village uses them on a major thoroughfare-Connecticut Avenue.

In light of the financial situation in Town, I am recommending to the Council in February that the **Mayor's salary**, which is set in the **Town Code**, be reduced by **33 percent**. While I think that the job description that has evolved over the years more than justifies the current modest salary, lowering this figure now is only fair in the context of other anticipated budget reductions.

I am pleased to report that we are on our way to reviving the **Somerset Art Show** that was in the recent past organized by the late **Alice Rowen** who lived on **Warwick Place**. Town artists **Florence Gang** and **Lila Snow** were attending the **New Year's Day** celebration in **Friendship Heights** with me when the idea was hatched. We are currently planning to have the next show in **August** at the **Village Center** with an opening reception early in the month. The show will be dedicated to Alice and her family will be invited to the reception. Sometime this month I will organize a meeting with the approximately fifteen working artists in Town and will set up a committee to plan the event. Anyone interested in helping would be welcomed.

Several Council members and I had a recent lunch meeting in Town Hall with **Josh Russin** from **Governor O'Malley's Office of Community Initiatives**. We talked about various State issues that affect the Town, and asked Josh to help us in obtaining overall property assessment information which we will need when considering the property tax rate for **FY 11**.

The quarterly **Brown Bag Lunch** last week was a success and very nicely attended. Before the meal began, we gathered around my office door and dedicated the conference room part of my office to late Council member **Judy Frankel**, who was a hard-working public servant in that position and served longer than anyone else in the Town's history. Mayor Emeritus **Walter Behr** and others made lovely remarks. We will have a photo of Judy on permanent display.

I am still getting too many complaints about **dogs walking unleashed** in Town and the resulting excessive droppings on people's lawns. I wish some folks would be more considerate.

Finally, I failed to get any responses to my request last month for volunteers to fill vacancies on our **Security Committee**. While I will now become pro-active and make some calls, please note that it is not too late to send me your resume.



Letters to the Editor

From Walter Behr, Grantham Avenue

After the failed **Christmas bombing** of an airliner over **Detroit**, I strongly recommend that residents do what they can to learn of emergency news as quickly as possible. The best way is to join **Montgomery County Emergency Alert System**, a **FREE** County service. which notifies subscribers of important events via **e-mail**, **cell phone**, **text pager**, **Blackberry**, and **personal digital assistant**. To subscribe, call

240-777-1000, or sign up on the website, https://alert.montgomerycountymd.gov.

As an example, after the huge **December snowstorm**, we received a **blizzard** and **high wind warning** and were notified of school and federal closings. In **November**, subscribers received two messages following breakdown of the County's **central traffic signal computer**. Last **winter**, subscribers were notified of the life-threatening break of a **66-inch water main**, **submerging River Road**.

If you cannot receive electronic messages, I urge you to make arrangements with a neighbor to pass along any relevant messages to you.

From Bridget Cowie, Uppingham Street

This year **Christmas** fell on a Friday and there was a **single trash pick-up** that week. As is customary, we had many guests to celebrate Christmas (entailing consumption of excessive food and beverage) and many gifts from Santa and associated boxes and wrappings. I suffered from **raccoon-phobia** for a few nights with trash overflowing on the side of our house,

and our front lawn was an eyesore when ready for trash pickup the following week. I would appreciate it if the **Town Council** can give some thought on how to manage the trash process during periods (e.g., **July 4th** or **December holidays**) when households may be entertaining and consuming more, yet left with less service due to a holiday falling on a Tuesday or Friday. It would be great if we can maintain twice-weekly service without the Town incurring undue costs.

From Brenda Gruss, Dorset Avenue

Please consider volunteering to donate blood at the NIH Blood Bank. The Blood Bank is so close to Somerset. and NIH makes it so easy to donate (Monday to Friday, 7:30 am-5:30 pm; free parking), that I hope Somerset residents take advantage of the Blood Bank's convenience to help save lives. The blood and platelets that the NIH Blood Bank collects are used for patients undergoing research protocols at the NIH Clinical Center (e.g., kidney transplant patients, patients with sickle cell anemia), and, depending on need, is shared with the Bethesda Naval Hospital and Walter Reed.

The Blood Bank is at the National Institutes of Health main campus in Bethesda, at Old Georgetown Road and Cedar Lane. Please call 301-496-1048 to schedule your appointment or visit the Blood Bank website at *bloodbank.nih.gov* for additional information. The Blood Bank also takes walk-ins.

Thank you for your caring and your help!

From Nancy Zivitz Sussman, Greystone Street

In order to catch a bus going to Friendship Heights from River Road near Greystone, one has to cross Little Falls to get to the western side of Little Falls, then cross River Road,

Journal Guidelines

- Deadline (designated by editor) is 4:30 p.m. on the 15th of each month. Articles submitted after the deadline might not be included in that month's Journal.
- Maximum length of articles by individual Council members and committee members, 500 words per issue.
- Research and information articles assigned by the Council or the Mayor can moderately exceed the 500 word limit in order to present complete information.
- Maximum length of obituaries and unsolicited articles by residents, 300 words.
- Maximum length of Letters to the Editor, 150 words.
- There is no promotion or advertisement of business or commercial interests within Journal articles, with the exception of Classified ads.
- Classified ads must be placed by a resident and contain resident's phone number.
- The Editor will exercise judgment on article length and appropriateness (Town Code grants authority to Editor for final decisions). The Editor may review changes to articles with author if time permits.
- The Publisher (the Mayor) authorizes final publication of the Journal.

Submission requirements for Journal:

- All items to be included in the Journal must be sent directly to Editor and must conform to the word limits outlined above.
- MSWord or text format by email, or typed and delivered.
- All inserts, artwork, and inclusions come through Editor to go to printer all at the same time.
- Changes to articles submitted after deadline at the discretion of the Editor.
- Documents should be submitted with no formatting, meaning:
 - All single spaced
 - Times New Roman typeface, 12 pt.
 - All paragraphs left block, including headings
 - No arbitrary punctuation
 - Double space (using enter) after paragraphs (not automatic double-spacing)
 - Any special treatment or emphasis within articles should be noted in a side note for the Editor

Editor will be happy to guide contributors in setting up their computer options to conform to formatting guidelines, or to offer guidance in preparing articles for submission.

then cross Little Falls again to get to the bus stop on River going toward Friendship Heights because there is **no crosswalk**. A crosswalk on River beginning on the eastern side of Little Falls would provide an easier crossing of River from Somerset at Little Falls.

If you agree, please sign a petition in the Mayor's office (please call the office first at **301-657-3211**) or send an email to Council member **Cathy Pickar** at *cpickar@Townofsomerset.com* in support of adding a fourth crosswalk at Little Falls and River. Cathy will see that the petition is forwarded to the appropriate state authority.

Legislation

At the January 4 meeting, the Council introduced Town Charter amendments regarding elections, including revising the dates for elections, revising early voting eligibility and procedures, clarifying the definition of qualified voters, and removing outdated information from the term lengths for the Board of Supervisors of Elections.

Council Activity

At the January 4 meeting, the Town Council:

- 1. Approved the minutes of the December 7, 2009, regular meeting as submitted.
- 2. Discussed and approved a draft RFP with changes for trash and recycling to be mailed out on January 8.
- 3. Approved a waiver for Joe Turi, 5517 Trent Street, to place the finished side of his replacement fence inwards on his side, subject to receipt of the \$150 application fee.
- 4. Approved an addition of a stoop to the north side of a previously approved building permit for David and Cathy Pickar, 4915 Dorset Avenue.
- 5. Recommended approval to the Historic Preservation Commission on an application by Daniel Hirsch and Brenda Gruss, 4901 Dorset Avenue, to add a screened porch on the existing deck at the rear of their house and a detached shed in their back yard.
- 6. Accepted the Georgetown Aquatics bid for management of the pool in 2010 and authorized the Town to notify High Sierra that we are not extending our current contract for the 2010 season.
- 7. Received the 2009 swimming pool financial report.
- 8. Approved a proclamation designating May 1 as Silver Star Banner Day for Somerset.
- 9. Authorized payment of \$100 annual dues to the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights for 2010.

Preliminary Agenda

Regular Meeting of Town Council

Monday, February 1, 2010 - 7:30 p.m.

Work Session of Town Council

Review of Council Follow-up List – 7:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting of Town Council

- 1. Approval of minutes of January 4 regular meeting 7:30 p.m.
- 2. Discussion of financial report 7:35 p.m.
- 3. Suggestions and questions from residents 7:40 p.m.
- 4. Action on swimming pool management contract with Georgetown Aquatics for 2010 season including consideration of amendments for: 1) early morning swim, 2) extended season in September, and 3) additional funding for a more experienced manager 7:50 p.m.**
- 5. Discussion of future of temporary speed humps at Dorset/Warwick Place and Essex/Warwick Place intersections 8:05 p.m.**
- 6. Discussion of proposed storm water project for Devon Lane 8:15 p.m.**
- 7. Action authorizing going out for bid to install storm water rain gardens at the Town Hall and at the bottom of Warwick Place 8:30 p.m.**
- 8. Action on Montgomery County building permit fee of \$20,000 to renovate the bathhouse 8:40 p.m.
- 9. Action on Town Charter amendments to make changes regarding elections, including revising the dates for elections, revising early voting eligibility and procedures, clarifying the definition of qualified voters, and removing outdated information from the term lengths for the Board of Supervisors of Elections 8:50 p.m.
- 10. Action on amendment to Town Code to adjust Mayor's salary down for 2010–2012 term of office on emergency basis 8:55 p.m.**
- 11. Mayor's report 9:00 p.m.
- 12. Update on pool renovation 9:05 p.m.
- 13. Adjournment 9:15 p.m.

This is a preliminary agenda prepared to meet the Journal press deadline, which typically is two weeks prior to the next Town Council meeting. During this period there will likely be changes to the timing of items, and some items may be added or deleted. Please consult the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch or the Town web site for the most up-to-date agenda.

Residents who wish to be present for a particular agenda item are advised to arrive 15 minutes ahead of the item's scheduled discussion time as discussion sometimes run ahead of schedule.

Items marked ** have related articles inside this issue of the Town Journal.



left to right: Council members Bill Farley, Barbara Zeughauser, Cathy Pickar, Vice President Marnie Shaul, Alan Proctor